

# THE NCS™

The National Citizen Survey™

## Boulder, CO

### Community Livability Report

2016



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# About

The National Citizen Survey™ (The NCS) report is about the “livability” of Boulder. The phrase “livable community” is used here to evoke a place that is not simply habitable, but that is desirable. It is not only where people do live, but where they want to live.

Great communities are partnerships of the government, private sector, community-based organizations and residents, all geographically connected. The NCS captures residents’ opinions within the three pillars of a community (Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation) across eight central facets of community (Safety, Mobility, Natural Environment, Built Environment, Economy, Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement).

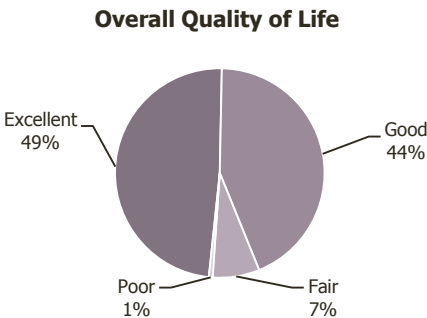
The Community Livability Report provides the opinions of a representative sample of 1,426 residents of the City of Boulder. The margin of error around any reported percentage is 3% for the entire sample. The full description of methods used to garner these opinions can be found in the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover.



# Quality of Life in Boulder

Almost all residents rated the quality of life in Boulder as excellent or good. This rating was higher than the national benchmark comparison (see Appendix B of the *Technical Appendices* provided under separate cover).

Shown below are the eight facets of community. The color of each community facet summarizes how residents rated it across the three sections of the survey that represent the pillars of a community – Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation. When most ratings across the three pillars were higher than the benchmark, the color for that facet is the darkest shade; when most ratings were lower than the benchmark, the color is the lightest shade. A mix of ratings (higher and lower than the benchmark) results in a color between the extremes.



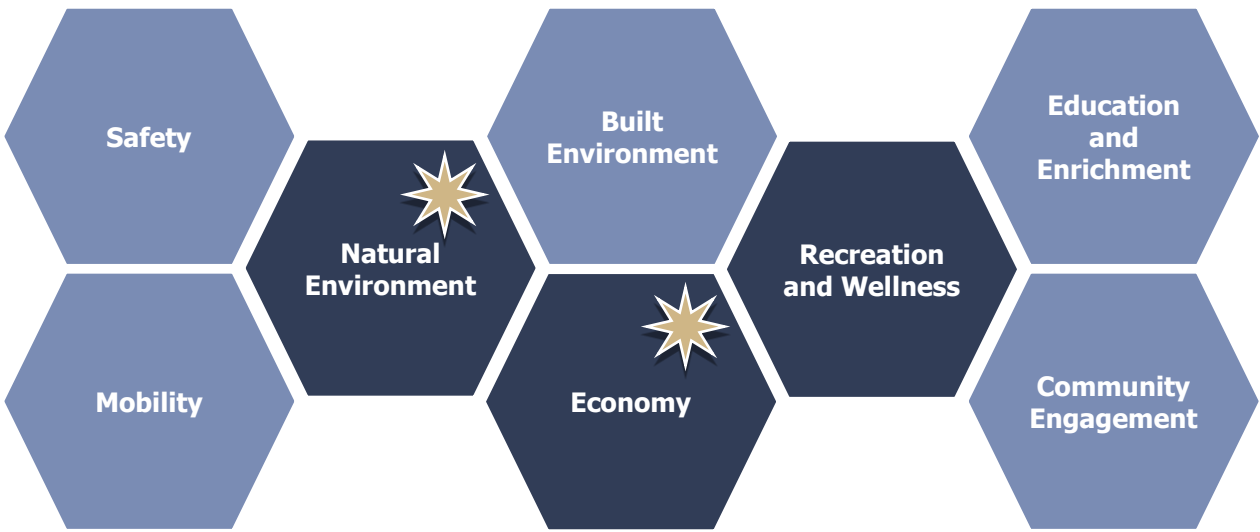
In addition to a summary of ratings, the image below includes one or more stars to indicate which community facets were the most important focus areas for the community. Residents identified Natural Environment and Economy as priorities for the Boulder community in the coming two years. It is noteworthy that Boulder residents gave particularly strong ratings to both of these facets of community as well as to Recreation and Wellness. Ratings for Safety, Mobility, Built Environment, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were positive and similar to other communities. This overview of the key aspects of community quality provides a quick summary of where residents see exceptionally strong performance and where performance offers the greatest opportunity for improvement. Linking quality to importance offers community members and leaders a view into the characteristics of the community that matter most and that seem to be working best.

Details that support these findings are contained in the remainder of this Livability Report, starting with the ratings for Community Characteristics, Governance and Participation and ending with results for Boulder’s unique questions.

## Legend

- Higher than national benchmark
- Similar to national benchmark
- Lower than national benchmark

★ Most important



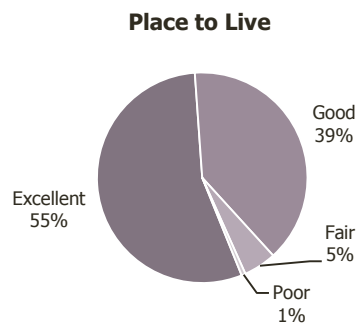
# Community Characteristics

*What makes a community livable, attractive and a place where people want to be?*

Overall quality of community life represents the natural ambience, services and amenities that make for an attractive community. How residents rate their overall quality of life is an indicator of the overall health of a community. In the case of Boulder, 94% rated the City as an excellent or good place to live. Respondents' ratings of Boulder as a place to live were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation.

In addition to rating the City as a place to live, respondents rated several aspects of community quality including Boulder as a place to raise children and to retire, their neighborhood as a place to live, the overall image or reputation of Boulder and its overall appearance. About 9 in 10 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall appearance of Boulder to their neighborhoods. Ratings for the overall appearance and the overall image of Boulder were higher than in comparison communities while ratings for neighborhoods, place to raise children and place to retire were similar to the national benchmarks.

Delving deeper into Community Characteristics, survey respondents rated over 40 features of the community within the eight facets of Community Livability. Almost all Boulder residents gave positive marks to all aspects of Safety, and these ratings were similar to ratings in other communities across the nation. Ratings within the facet of Mobility were mixed. Ratings for paths and walking trails, ease of walking, travel by bicycle and travel by public transportation were all higher than in comparison communities while ratings for ease of travel by car, public parking and traffic flow were lower than the benchmarks. At least 4 in 5 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to each aspect of Natural Environment and ratings for the overall natural environment and the cleanliness of Boulder were higher than the benchmarks. The facet of Built Environment also saw mixed ratings; a majority gave positive ratings to the overall quality of new development in Boulder and public places. Ratings for public

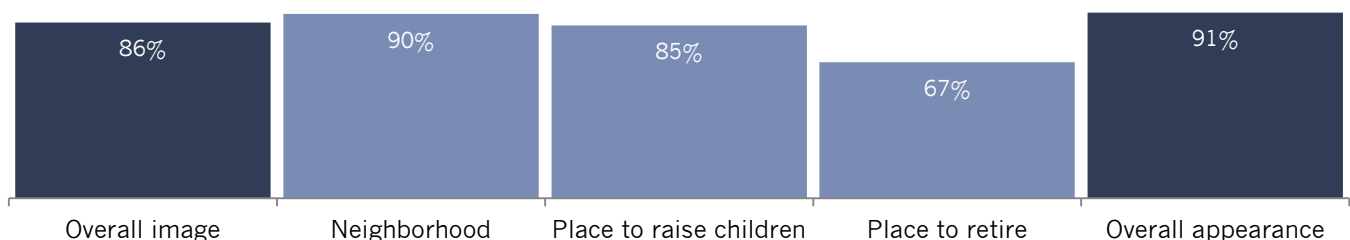


places were higher than the benchmark. However, only 10% gave positive ratings to affordable quality housing in Boulder and 20% rated housing options in Boulder as excellent or good, and these ratings were both lower than the national benchmarks. Almost all aspects of Economy were rated exceptionally strong; all received positive marks from a majority of residents and were higher than the benchmark with the exception of ratings for cost of living (10% excellent or good) which were lower than in comparison communities. All aspects of Recreation and Wellness, Education and Enrichment and Community Engagement were rated positively by at least half of the survey respondents and were similar to or higher than the national benchmarks.

Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)

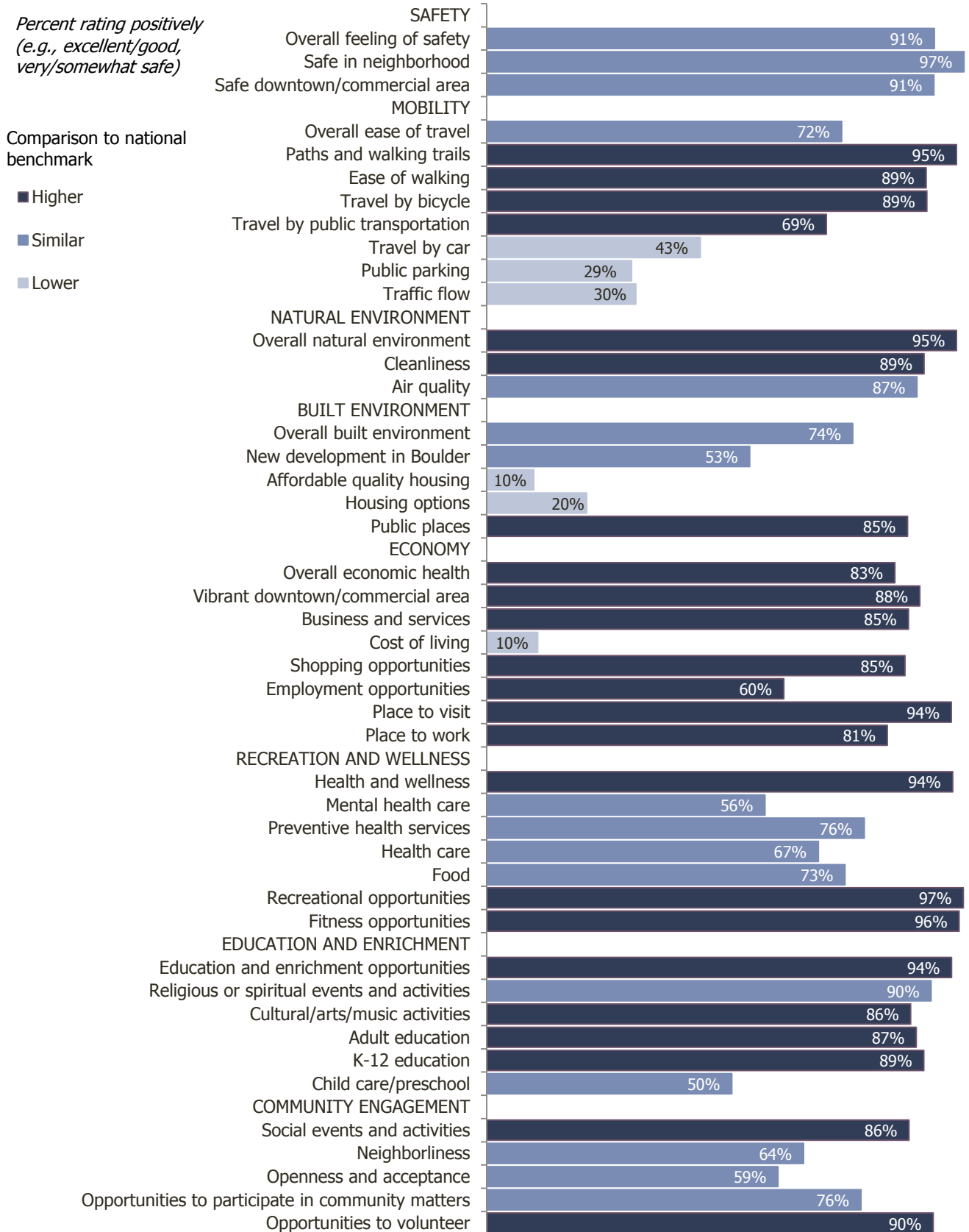
Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



## The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 1: Aspects of Community Characteristics



# Governance

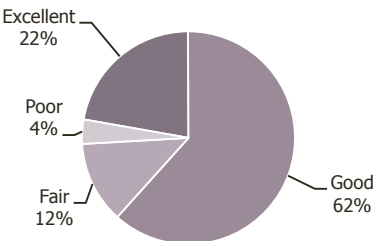
## *How well does the government of Boulder meet the needs and expectations of its residents?*

The overall quality of the services provided by Boulder as well as the manner in which these services are provided are a key component of how residents rate their quality of life. About 84% of Boulder residents rated the overall quality of City services as excellent or good, while about 48% rated the Federal government positively. Ratings for the City government and the Federal government were similar to the national benchmark comparisons.

Survey respondents also rated various aspects of Boulder's leadership and governance. About half of the survey respondents gave positive ratings to the overall direction of Boulder, welcoming citizen involvement, confidence in City government, acting in the best interest of Boulder and treating all residents fairly. About 6 in 10 gave positive ratings to the value of services for taxes paid and 8 in 10 gave excellent or good ratings to the overall customer service provided by City of Boulder employees. All of these ratings were similar to ratings in comparison communities across the nation.

Respondents evaluated over 30 individual services and amenities available in Boulder. All aspects of Governance tended to be rated positively by a majority of respondents and were similar to or higher than the national benchmarks. Almost all respondents gave excellent or good ratings to: fire services, ambulance/EMS, garbage collection, recycling, Boulder open space, City parks, recreation programs, recreation centers and public libraries. Ratings for emergency preparedness, bus or transit services, recycling, drinking water, natural areas preservation, open space, City parks, recreation programs and recreation centers were higher than ratings in benchmark communities.

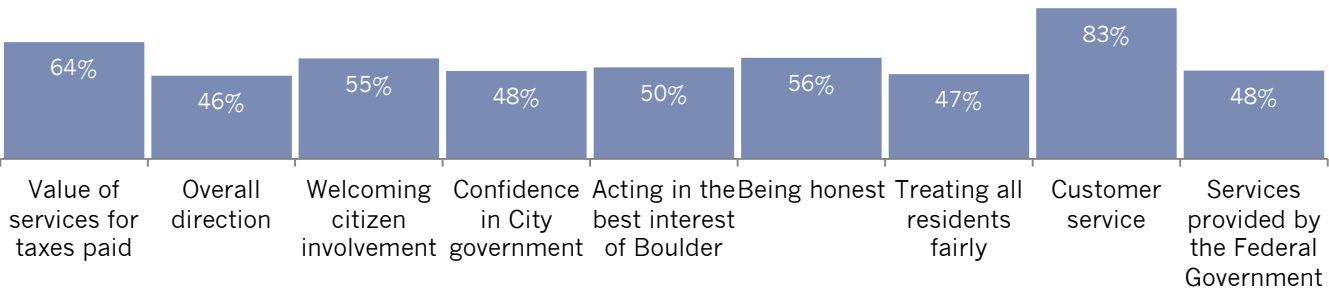
**Overall Quality of City Services**



*Percent rating positively (e.g., excellent/good)*

Comparison to national benchmark

■ Higher ■ Similar ■ Lower



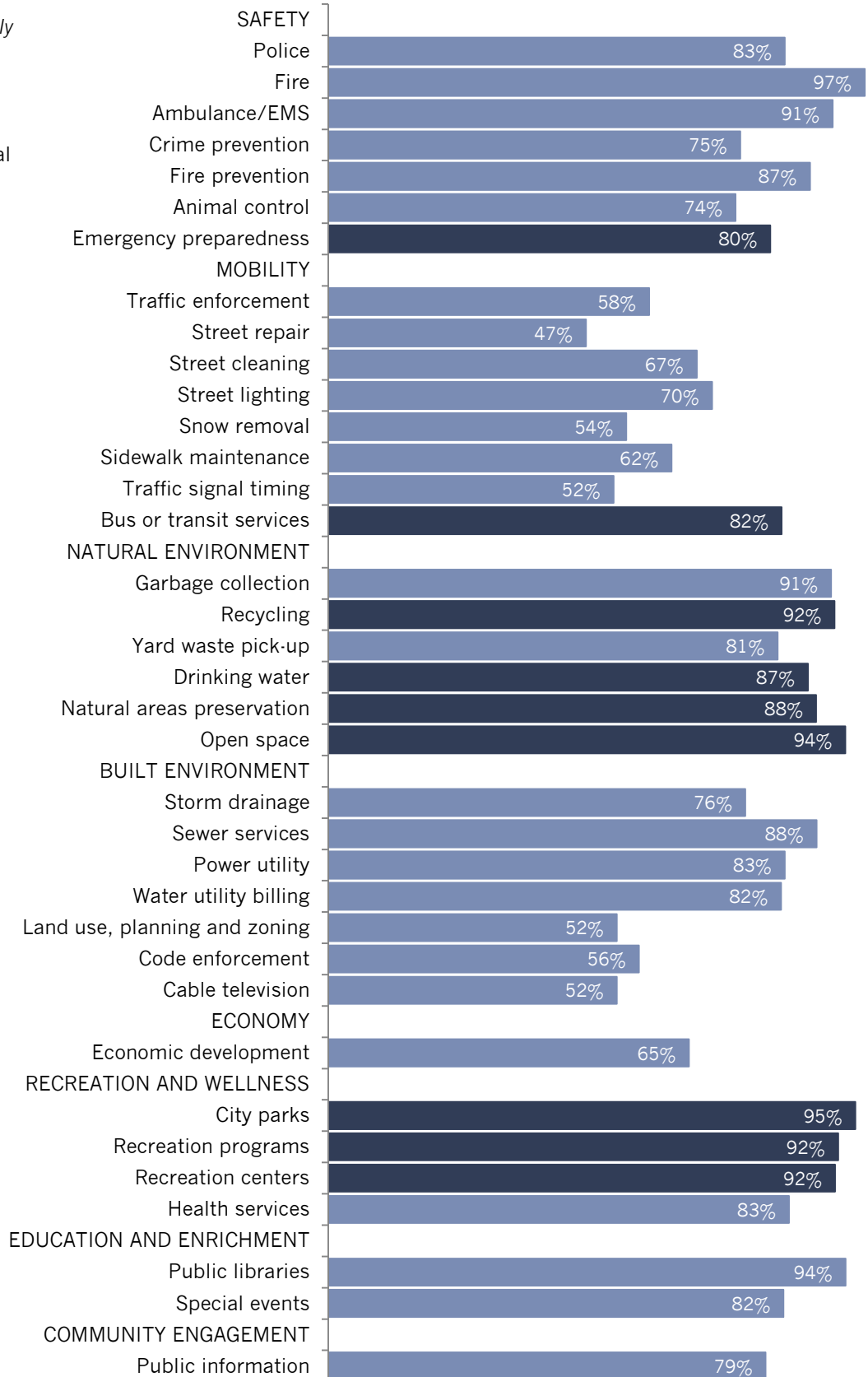
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Figure 2: Aspects of Governance

Percent rating positively  
(e.g., excellent/good)

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower



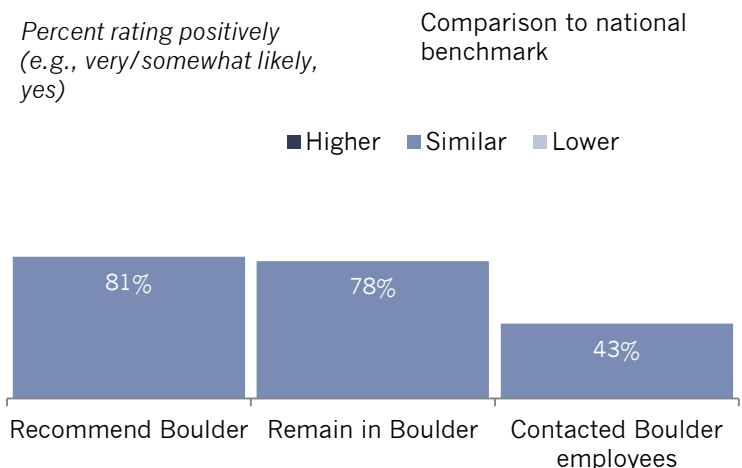
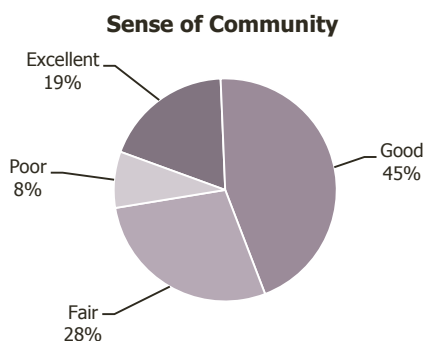


# Participation

## *Are the residents of Boulder connected to the community and each other?*

An engaged community harnesses its most valuable resource, its residents. The connections and trust among residents, government, businesses and other organizations help to create a sense of community, a shared sense of membership, belonging and history. A majority of respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall sense of community in Boulder, and this rating was similar to the national benchmark. At least three-quarters of respondents reported that they were likely to recommend living in Boulder and planned to remain in Boulder for the next five years; these rates were similar to those in other communities across the nation.

The survey included over 30 activities and behaviors for which respondents indicated how often they participated in or performed each, if at all. Rates of Participation tended to vary within facets. Rates of Participation within Mobility were particularly strong when compared to other jurisdictions; all were higher than the benchmarks. Further, more Boulder residents reported that they had recycled at home, worked in Boulder, visited a City park, participated in physical activity, attended a City-sponsored event, campaigned for an issue, cause or candidate, volunteered or participated in a club than residents in other jurisdictions. Fewer Boulder residents were NOT under housing cost stress and fewer reported participating in religious or spiritual activities when compared to other communities. All other rates of Participation were similar to the benchmarks.



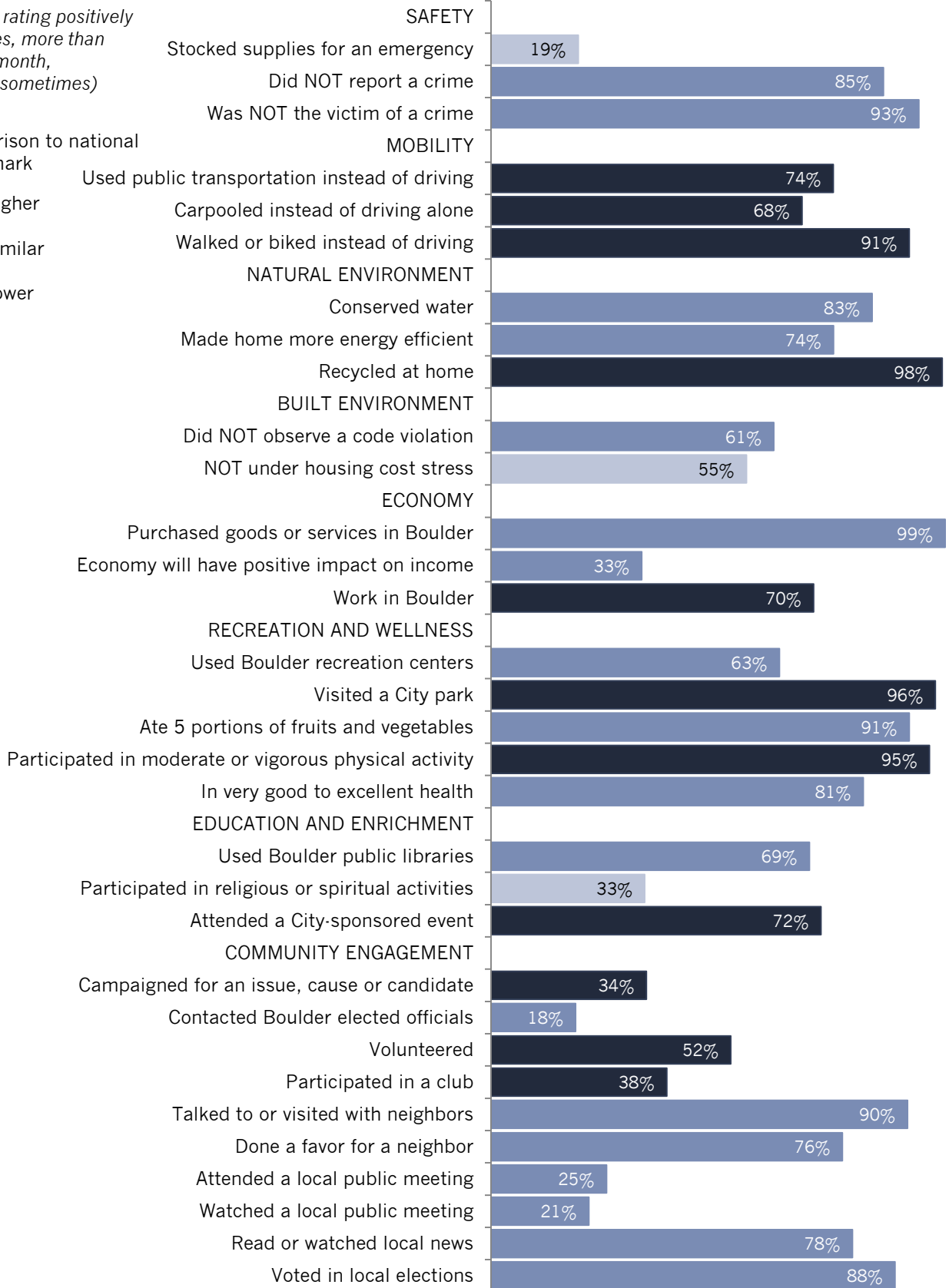
## The National Citizen Survey™

Figure 3: Aspects of Participation

Percent rating positively  
(e.g., yes, more than  
once a month,  
always/sometimes)

Comparison to national  
benchmark

- Higher
- Similar
- Lower

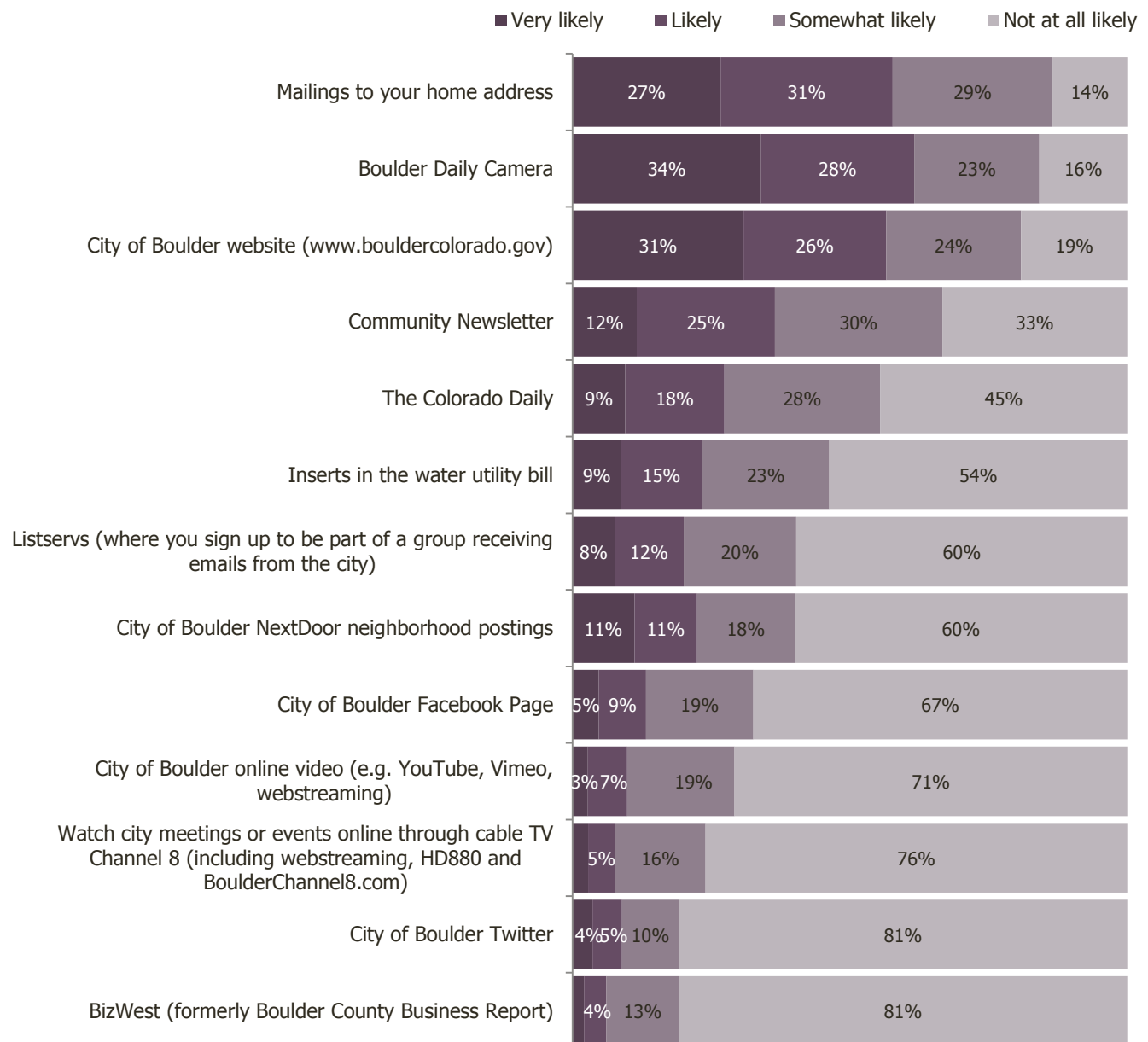


# Special Topics

The City of Boulder included two questions of special interest on The NCS. The first question asked respondents to rate their likelihood of using different information channels to obtain information about community events. A majority were at least somewhat likely to obtain information through mailings to their homes, the Boulder Daily Camera, City of Boulder website, community newsletters and The Colorado Daily. At least three-quarters of respondents were not at all likely to obtain information from watching City meetings or events online or on cable TV, through the City of Boulder Twitter or from BizWest.

Figure 4: Information Sources

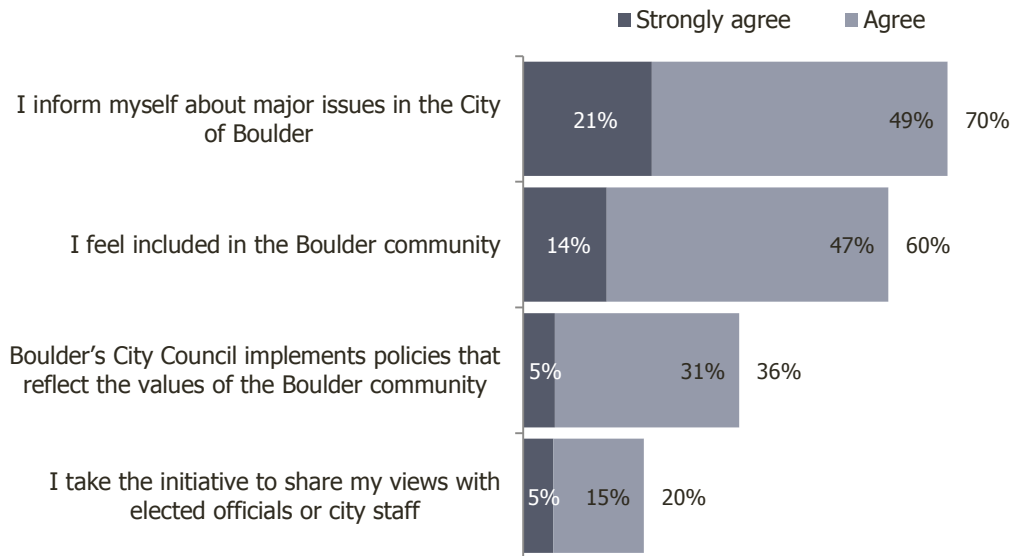
*How likely, if at all, are you to use one of the following information channels to obtain information about community events such as City Council meetings, community meetings and upcoming events?*



The second Boulder-specific question asked residents to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with some statements about Boulder. A majority agreed that they informed themselves about major issues in the City of Boulder and felt included in the Boulder community. About one-third agreed that Boulder's City Council implements policies that reflect the values of the Boulder community and about 20% agreed that they take initiative to share their views with elected officials or City staff.

Figure 5: Community Involvement and Inclusivity

*Please rate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements.*



# Conclusions

## Quality of life is exceptionally high in Boulder

About 9 in 10 residents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall quality of life in Boulder, Boulder as a place to live, the overall image of Boulder, their neighborhoods and the overall appearance of Boulder. Further, ratings for the overall quality of life in Boulder, the overall image of Boulder and the overall appearance of Boulder were higher than the national benchmarks. At least three-quarters of residents were likely to recommend living in Boulder and planned to remain in Boulder for the next five years. Most of the aspects that aid in community livability were rated positively and were at least similar to the national benchmark comparison.

## Residents value Natural Environment

Boulder's Natural Environment was identified as a top priority for the community and was an area that consistently received high ratings from residents. At least 4 in 5 respondents gave excellent or good ratings to the overall natural environment, cleanliness and air quality. The vast majority of residents rated services in this area positively. Ratings for Boulder's open space, natural areas preservation, drinking water and recycling were also rated higher than the benchmarks. Demonstrating their personal interest in this area, nearly all residents—and more than elsewhere—recycled.

## Economy is a strong and important community feature

Residents indicated that the economy was an important community feature to focus on over the next two years. About 4 in 5 respondents felt very positive about the overall economic health of the community, and this rating was higher than the national benchmark. Boulder as a place to work, place to visit, employment opportunities, shopping opportunities, the overall quality of businesses and services and vibrant downtown/commercial areas all received ratings higher than ratings in other communities across the nation. However, it's important to note that 10% gave positive ratings to the cost of living in Boulder and this rating was much lower than the national benchmark.